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AUTHOR Hudelson, Sarah
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ABSTRACT

A case study of the progress of Janice, a native Spanish speaking second grader learning English in a Florida public school, focuses on the classroom environment in which she was learning English, her writing development, her perceptions of writing in English and how they changed over time, and her struggles in the face of her teacher's and others' expectations of her writing. The approach of the study, begun as an objective examination of the process of a child simultaneously acquiring native language and English literacy, became one of direct encouragement of the pupil based on a whole language perspective on literacy education, involving meaningful reading and writing experiences. The study followed Janice from her first days in the United States to the end of the school year, which included both standard classes with instruction in English and daily classes in English as a second language. The researcher's regular meetings with the student are chronicled, and samples of her writing and drawing are included. It is concluded that the student's writing was influenced at points during the year by her classroom instruction and her teachers' assumptions about English literacy: that correct spelling and letter formation are prerequisite's to communication, that writing consists of using lists of words in sentences, that writing is accurate copying, that one should write only if spelling correctly, that the teacher assigns what and when to write, and that nonfluent English speakers shouldn't or can't write English. Despite this, Janice did write and did make progress when given the encouragement of a whole language learning environment. (MSE)

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Janice: Becoming a Writer of English

Sarah Hudelson

During the 1981-82 school year I conducted some research in one of the Dade County, Florida public schools. The original intent of the research was to observe and to document the development of English as a second language literacy in some children already literate in their native language. Four native Spanish speakers were chosen, two from a sixth grade and two from a second grade classroom. The research techniques included nonparticipant observation and the taking of field notes in each classroom, conversations with the teachers, and informal interactions and more formal audiotaped sessions with the targeted children, including monthly collection of reading and writing samples from them. My original questions were: 1) How do these second language learners make sense of their English instructional environments and 2) as they interact with these environments, how do they develop literacy (both reading and writing) in English as a second language? However, a personal commitment to a particular view of literacy (both in a first and a second language) resulted in a shift from supposedly objective documentation of what I was observing to direct efforts to encourage the subjects' reading and writing from this whole language perspective on language development.

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In classrooms for native speakers of English, whole language approaches to literacy involve children in reading experiences with whole, meaningful discourse and in writing experiences in which they are asked, from the beginning

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of their schooling, to create whole pieces. The perspective taken is that children learn to read by reading and learn to write (or compose, meaning the sending of one's own message) by writing and by having other people react to what they have written and revised. Proponents of whole language approaches to literacy (Clay, 1975 ; Edelsky 1982 ; Goodman and Goodman, 1979 ; Graves, 1982; Smith, 1977;1981 and many others)maintain that children are aware of andinterested in writing even before they enter school; that children are willing and even eager to write about topics of their own choice; that children can and should begin writing before they have mastered such conventions of the language as capitalization, punctuation and standard spelling; that reading and writing are closely connected to each other; that skill as a writer develops within the context of authentic, purposeful writing rather than through practicing isolated skills. Quite recently, researchers and teachers who have documented similarities between both the processes of first and second language acquisition in children and effective environments for first and second language development (Edelsky, 1982; Urzua, 1980 ; 1982), have suggested that such whole language literacy environments are appropriate for second language acquirers as well as for native speakers. As will become evident, this view of literacy development influenced my interactions with the children I was studying.

The subject of this paper is Janice, a second grader I came to know and care for. Specifically I plan to describe the classroom context in which Janice found herself as an English learner; present and analyze some of Janice's writing over the course of the year; consider how her perceptions of writing in English changed over time; and document her struggles in dealing with her

teachers' expectations for her in terms of writing compared with my own expectations of and requests to her.

As is the case in many schools where there are large concentrations of limited English speaking children, the first few weeks of the school year were taken up with language assessment and placement and with the organization and coordination of all of the teachers' schedules. As a result, my first opportunity to meet Janice came in late September, after she had been assigned to a second grade class, half of whom were native Spanish speakers designated as of limited English proficiency. Of the others, three were native speakers of Russian, five native speakers of English, and four fluent English -Spanish bilinguals. The teacher was a native Spanish speaker who had arrived in this country in 1962. The language of classroom instruction was English.

By late September the daily class schedule had been organized. School opened at 8:19 with morning exercises and announcements. At 8:30 most of the Spanish speakers including Janice left the room for an hour of instruction in Spanish reading and writing. The materials used were developed in Dade County and utilized a phonics-linguistic approach to Spanish reading, with a lot of copying of syllables and works in workbooks. In this class the children did not do any original writing in Spanisn. At nine-thirty when these children returned to the classroom, everyone participated in English language arts and math activities until lunch at 11:30. Two days during the week the morning activities also included library and music time. After lunch the class participated in science, social studies, and films or art activities. However, the limited English speakers, Janice included, attended pullout ESOL classes three times a week from 12:15 to 1:15. Dismissal for second graders was at 1:45.

Janice received English literacy instruction both in her own classroom

and in the ESOL class. The regular classroom teacher used a combination of boardwork and basal readers. The boardwork involved weekly spelling words to read and to copy, daily sentences to copy and illustrate, and incomplete sentences with a choice of words to complete each sentence. This work was accomplished through repeated teacher reading and student repetition. When utilizing the basal readers, the most common strategy was oral reading by one child at a time, with corrections of oral reading by the teacher and other pupils. Discussions and/or questions about the reading were rare. Most of the time devoted to basal readers was taken up with completing the workbook pages which focused on sound-letter correspondences. Early in the school year, daily oral practice of the alphabet took place. This lasted until November. No original writing was done in the regular classroom .

In the ESOL class the teacher used the Miami Linguistic Readers and a Peabody Language Development Kit. Over the year the children progressed from formal English reading readiness to reading patterned readers such as Nat the Rat. As with the basal readers, a great amount of time was devoted to workbook activities, particularly copying letters, syllables, words and sentences. Although one of the ESOL teachers was a native Spanish speaker, students were not allowed to use any Spanish in the ESOL room. Writing instruction consisted of copying letters. As in the regular classroom, original writing was nonexistent.

Both English literacy situations could be categorized as teacher directed or controlled, as textbook oriented, as skills based. The teacher initiated all of the activities and directed student responses. Daily activities came strictly from text materials, and children were evaluated on the basis of how well they were able to perform on workbook tasks. Children were not asked what they might want to read, nor were they asked to create their own messages, to write on their own. In fact, the teachers expressed the view that children had to

learn how to pronounce and write letters and words before they could be asked to write on their own. Reading instruction focused almost exclusively on sounds, syllables, and words, rather than on connected text. Children's reading performance was evaluated on how accurately words were pronounced, not on demonstration of any ability to consider the message. Within this instructional framework, how did Janice cope with English literacy? How did Janice develop as a writer of English over the school year?

The teachers had given me permission to work individually with my targeted children once or twice a month. On those occasions, we would leave the room and find a place where we could talk and work. We would chat (usually in Spanish),and I would ask them to do some reading and/or writing. Since Janice did no original writing in her classroom, the samples collected in our sessions are the ones considered below.

In September, Janice, newly arrived from Puerto Rico, was placed in a second grade classroom in a school setting in a language she didn't understand. I remember seeing her for the first time, a slight, lightcomplexioned child, with shoulder length light brown hair and big brown eyes. She sat quietly at one of the desks, taking in everything that happened, trying by mimicing what others were doing to fit in. Although subdued, she had a ready smile, and she became much more outgoing as the year went on. The first time we met, I determined informally that she could both read and write in Spanish. Although her writing was full of unconventional segmentation and invented spellings (Edelsky, 1982; Hudelson, 1981), she was willing, even eager, to write in Spanish. She understood that she could use the written form to send her own messages. She described some of her feelings for Puerto Rico:

- Insert Figure 1 here -

The earliest writing collected in English from Janice was the results of an English spelling test. Janice was asked to spell ten words:

- Insert Figure 2 here -

Three of the ten words she spelled in standard English orthography, the result of a week spent practicing writing and rewriting the list. The rest of the words were spelled basically by applying Spanish orthography to English. Janice had developed two strategies for spelling English: 1) memorize the English spelling if you can; 2) if you haven't memorized the word, spell the word as you are able to pronounce it and use Spanish orthography. Janice was aware that the two orthographic systems were different. But when she needed to, she resorted to Spanish to solve her English spelling problems. She invented spellings in her second language as children do in their native language (Sorenson and Kerstetter, 1979; Hudelson, 1981).

Later in October, in our two person session, I persuaded Janice to write something original in English. Initially she protested that she couldn't because she didn't know any English. She had with her a picture of some people. A question as to who they were elicited a reply in Spanish, followed by the English: a mother and a father. I suggested that she did know some English, after which she wrote:

- Insert Figure 3-

That was it: my mother and my father. She refused to write any more. As she had done before, Janice exhibited in her second language writing characteristics of young writers in their native language: invented spelling and unconventional segmentation. I also noted that initially Janice had spelled

the word my correctly before subsequently inventing the spelling. Several researchers involved in looking at young children's native language writing have suggested that, as children experiment as writers, attention to one aspect of what one is writing may result in another aspect not being attended to, resulting in the child's appearing to regress(in this case, knowing how to spell and then seemingly not knowing how to spell my). It is probable that when she wrote my the first time she was concentrating on that word. But as she struggled with mother and father, she did not attend to subsequent spellings of the word.

In November Janice would not write anything original in English. When we met, I provided her with paper and a variety of pens and crayons, suggesting that she could draw something and then write about what she had drawn. The drawing she did willingly, chatting about what she was doing. But when I asked her to write something about what she had drawn, she refused. I did retrieve the results of another spelling test, which is shown below:

-Insert Figure 4-

As she took this test, Janice displayed a high degree of concentration on the task. As her teacher called out each word, Janice spelled it rapidly and then examined her work. Sometimes she erased and rewrote the word, sometimes not. Janice made an obvious effort to remember how to spell the words that she had practiced all week and to write them down in the test setting. When memory failed, she once more made good use of her knowledge of her native language. Janice also applied phonetic spelling, when she substituted t for d (unvoiced for voiced consonant sound). Children's use of phonetic categories as they experiment with spelling in their native language has been well documented (Hudelson, 1981; Read,1975).

In December, Janice spent a considerable amount of time drawing a picture of a ship on the high seas and a child next to the ship. She explained in Spanish that her friend Roberto had come to this country on a boat (in fact he was a child of the Mariel boatlift from Cuba in 1980). but when asked to write something about what she had drawn, she wrote: The cat is drink. Dog sit. Tiff is sitting.

- Insett Figure 5-

Then she wrote Roberto's name next to the boy and Puerto Rico on the ship's flag.

Almost certainly Janice would have had difficulties in expressing in English all of what she had shared in Spanish, yet what she wrote basically had no connection to her picture. Then I realized that the sentences she had written came from the Miami Linguistic Readers. A plausible interpretation, I think, is that the daily routine of copying words and sentences had influenced her to the extent that at this point in time she considered writing to be copying and that she was unwilling to write something that was other than workdook format and/or something that she had practiced earlier. When adults asked you to write, they wanted accuracy of copying. Rather than attempt to send a message of her own, Janice's writing strategy was to attempt to reproduce a text she had learned to copy. Classroom influences on children's perceptions of literacy tasks also have been documented in research done on native speakers of English (DeFord, 1981).

In our writing session in January, Janice drew a picture of a television with a figure inside it. Below that she drew a picture of a house, after which she wrote in Spanish: una casa y una niña. When I asked her if she could write something in English she wrote: un TV and girls and house. While the

- Insert Figure 6-

message was minimal, at least Janice was willing (even at a lexical level and translating from Spanish) to try to send her own message in English as well as in Spanish. Spanish orthography still dominated her English spelling, although the word and was spelled conventionally.

A few weeks later Janice produced this detailed drawing of a house, a drawing she spent considerable time creating (Donald Graves has noted that drawing is closely connected to writing and for some children may constitute a rehearsal of what one wishes to write). Then she picked up a separate sheet of paper and wrote the following:

- Insert Figure7 -

She spelled the words my, is, red and black without hesitation, but she asked me for help with flowers and tree. As in previous sessions, Janice was willing to spell even though her spellings were not conventional (I gave her no help, telling her to spell the words as best she could). But I began to notice some changes in her spellings. Instead of using the Spanish j,Janice now used the English h to begin house. Her spelling of tree as three reflected the use of English orthogrpahy plus her own pronunciation of the word, not Spanish orthogrpahy. Clearly , as Janice was gradually able to assimilate information about the nature of English spelling and as she read more and more in English, she began to apply this growing knowledge to her own spelling.

A first look at this piece also suggested that Janice was writing a sentence (My haus is red) that did not come directly from her English reading material. To my knowledge, this sentence had not been used in written form in either the regular classroom or the ESOL room. Perhaps this was a real breakthrough, at attempt by Janice to go beyond practiced patterns in her writing.

This speculation proved to be incorrect. In March Janice placed herself in the role of a child taking a spelling test and produced this test paper:

- Insert Figure 8-

A question about number seven on the test made it clear that in her classroom the children were now putting spelling words into sentences and practicing them this way. So what seemed to have come from Janice herself actually had come from classroom instruction.

After playing school, Janice settled down to create a picture and to write about it. Again she drew a house in vivid red and blue, and on a separate sheet of paper she wrote: My house is red and blue and I got flowers and trees and I got apples. That is the house my grandmother. Initially she stopped after the word apple. This effort greatly encouraged and excited me, because I felt sure that here Janice was sending her own message in written form without having practiced the sentences in written form (What English teacher would have the children write I got X!) When Janice stopped writing, I asked her: Is this your house Janice? She shook her head no and told me in Spanish that it was her grandmother's house, after which she wrote the last sentence.

- Insert Figure 9-

As she spelled gradnmother the first time (note the crossed out effort), she informed that it was spelled incorrectly. Then she spied a basal reader. She picked it up, found the word grandmother in a story that she had read and copied the words with the text as her reference. Janice proved herself once more to be both a risk taker and a problem solver. She was not stoppdd either by her lack of ability to produce standard English orthogrpahy or by her less than

fluent and standard oral English.

By April Janice's picture became more complex. She drew two houses connected by a winding road, with a vehicle on the road and a person standing by a bench at the roadside. Then she wrote: I got a hotel and one tree and one bus and one street and one house and one girl(attempted in cursive), after which she stopped.

- IMsert Figure 10 -

Then something new occurred. Janice read back what she had written to herself without any request from me that she do so, after which she commented: Mira que tengo puros ones aqui. (Look at all the ones I have here).At this point I asked her what the girl was doing, to which Janice replied in Spanish that she was waiting for the bus. Then she wrote: waiting the bus. When I asked why, Janice protested (again in Spanish) that she didn't remember how to say in English that the bus was going to take her to the hotel. I replied: Oh, the bus is going to take her to the hotel. Janice then reread what she had written and added: take to the hotel. A final query as to why she was going to the hotel resulted in this: visit him grandmother. Then she quickly added that she was too tired to write anymore. This effort had tired her and rightly so. What an effort she made. She demonstrated a variety of developing second language abilities. She assumed the role of reader as well as writer. She commented on her own use of language. She took risks and made mistakes. She experimented with a new kind of writing. She made additions to her piece. She reread what she had written to help herself as she proceeded forward. She utilized translations when she needed to. She made use of environmental print (Janice revealed that she lived in an old Miami Beach hotel converted into apartments. The word hotel still appeared on the building facade.)

She expended a lot of effort to express herself in English. With this piece, I had a real sense that Janice was beginning to see herself as a writer of English.

In May Janice performed two different kinds of writing tasks. On one occasion she used the wordless picture book A Boy A Dog A Frog and a Friend by Mercer Mayer to create a story. On another occasion, she drew and wrote whatever she chose. When confronted with the wordless picture book, she leafed through the whole thing, telling the story in Spanish. She then produced this narrative, describing what happened in the story:

- Insert Figure 11 -

She stayed with the task for almost half an hour; she was willing to solve her own spelling problems (she didn't even ask me to spell words); she asked for translations for a couple of words that she didn't know in English (for example. turtle); she moved through the whole book almost completely by herself. What she produced was an accurate description of what was happening on each page. What she didn't do was use any literary language or book talk (Smith, 1977), the kind of language storytellers use to tell stories. Janice did not attempt to create a flowing story. She even returned to a new line for each sentence, a fact that might have been an artifact of instruction, and something that appears in some of her other pieces as well. Researchers in native language writing have suggested that use of literary language in one's own writing comes after exposure to a lot of books(Graves,1982; Smith,1977). This was not happening for Janice, either in English or in Spanish. However, in comparison with what she produced in May after making a picture (see Figure 11), this first attempt to tell a wordless story resulted in Janice's producing more quantity than on previous occasions and moved her from her tendency to write

everything in rather a serial, catalogue fashion (I got this and I got that).

- Insert Figure 12 -

So here again I sensed progress. Unfortunately the school year ended, and I was not able to work with Janice anymore.

What I have reported here is a school year's worth of observations and work sessions with Janice. During this year I saw Janice move from writing strings of words in English using Spanish orthography, to writing sentences based on classroom models, to writing her own messages in a reflection of her own development as a user of English. I saw Janice move from running several words together to using fairly conventional segmentation. Her spelling changed from an almost total reliance on Spanish orthography to a combination of English and Spanish. I witnessed Janice's purposeful self rereading.
I believe that I saw Janice begin to see herself as a someone who could write in English, as someone who could send messages that could be read and reacted to by others. I also watched Janice move from virtually a nonEnglish speaker to a child who is able to produce quite a lot of English and who is willing to converse in the language. And I do not want to make light of that point.

Throughout this paper, references have been made to composition research with speakers of a native language. Clearly some of that of research, as well as the whole language approach to literacy that underlies it, has influenced my perceptions of what Janice (and other second language learners) should be experiencing in classrooms. But I do not and cannot equate Janice with native speakers of English, either in terms of her English language abilities or in terms of the product expectations of her (what her pieces would be). Certainly some of her hesitations about producing English as well as her

actual productions are at least partially attributable to her almost nonexistent English at the beginning ot this study. But I am also convinced that the classroom instruction she was receiving and the assumptions about English literacy held by her teachers contributed to her perceptions about writing, perceptions which influenced what she did at various points in time. Janice's classroom experiences with writing, if one can call them experiences, were based on the assumptions that correct spelling and letter formation were prerequisites to sending one's own messages, that writing consisted of using lists of words in sentences, that writing was accurate copying, that one should write only what one can spell correctly, that the teacher assigns when to write and what to write about, including what words to use, that nonfluent speakers of English can't begin to write English or shouldn't write English.

But in spite of this, Janice did give signs that she did want to write or at least that she was willing to write when encouraged. As Janice wrote, she became better at what she did. Janice was willing to try to write even though she lacked oral control of the language. She did write and she did make progress. But she produced the samples shown in this paper, minimal as they are, in an environment that accepted the use of the native language as a help to learning English, in an environment that was supportive, in an environment that deemphasized the form and tried to get her to express herself in whatever way she could, in an environment that believed that Janice could produce. Imagine the progress she might have made if the whole school experience for her had been such.

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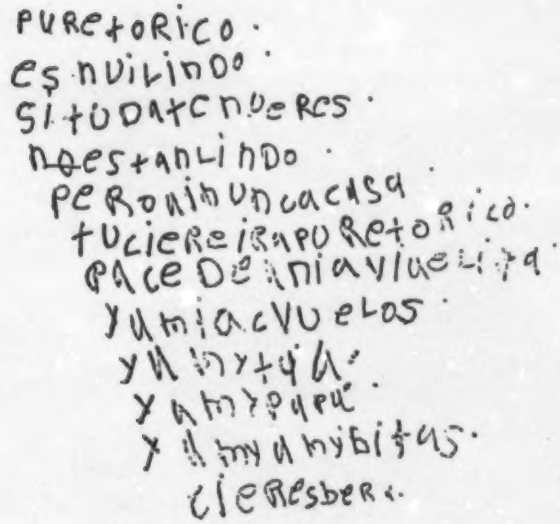
Figure 1



Puerto Rico es muy lindo
Los Estados Unidos no
es tan lindo

tengo una casa
tu quieres ir a Puerto
Rico
Tengo una abuelita
y mis abuelos
y a mi
y a mi papa
y a mi amigitos

quieres ver

Figure 2

FUNNY	FONI
GO	GO
HELP	JELP
HERE	JIR
I	I
IN	EN
IS	ES
IT	IT
JUMP	JOM
LITTLE	LITO

Figure 3

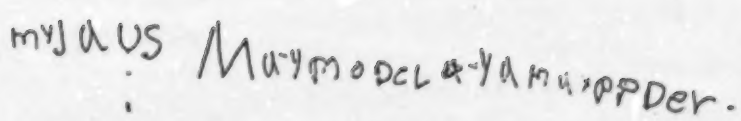


Figure 4

have	jav
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Figure 5

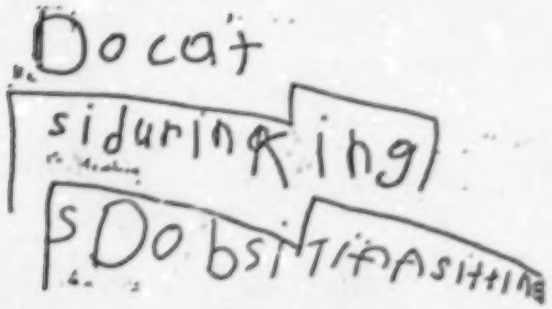
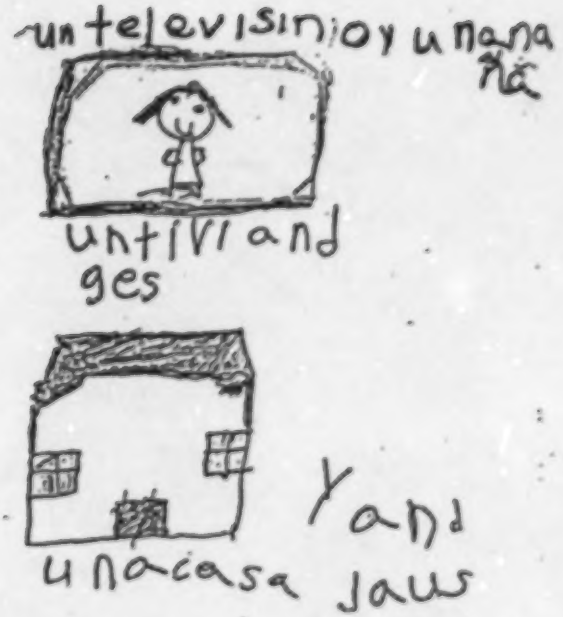


Figure 6



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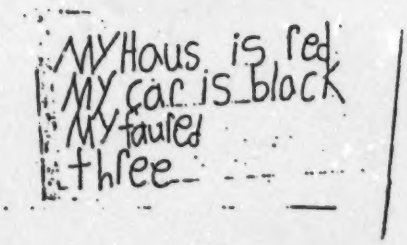

Figure 8

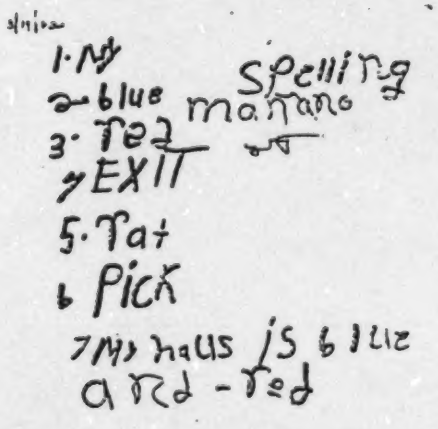

Figure 9

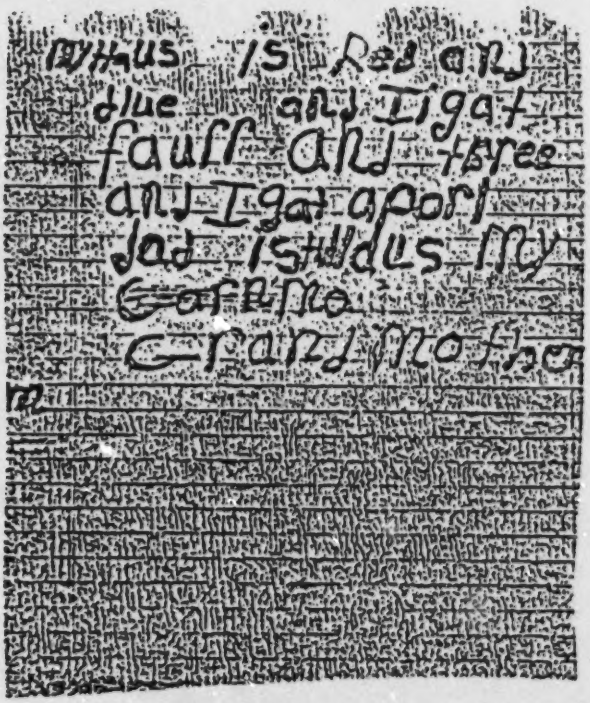

Figure 10

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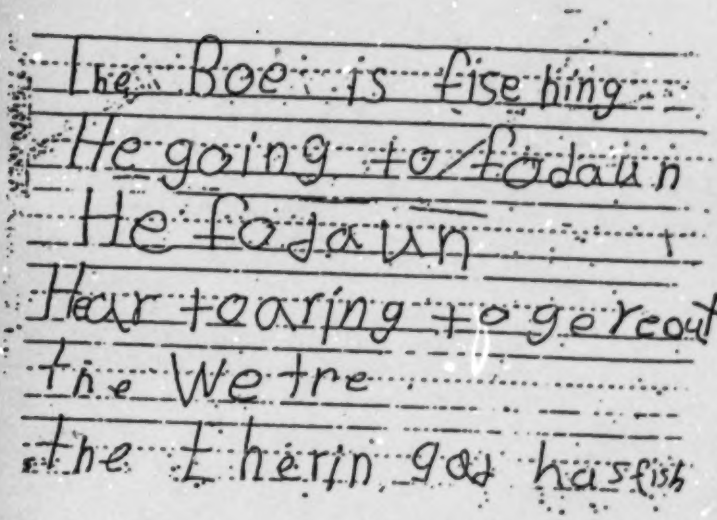
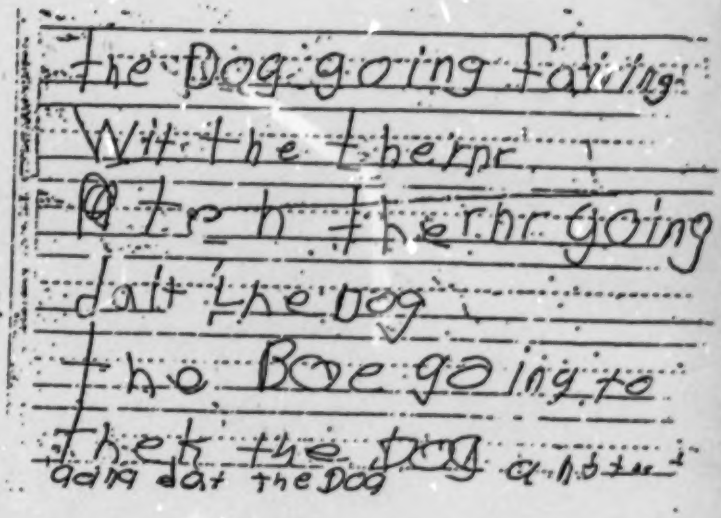
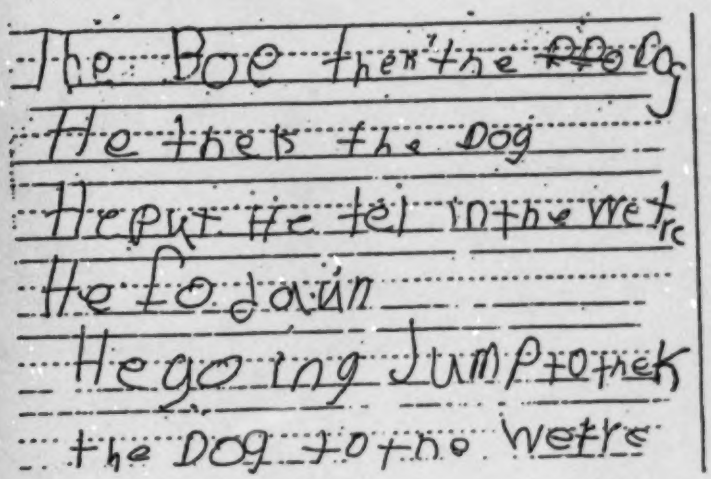
Figure 11



The boy is fishing
He going to fall down
He fall down
He trying to get out the water
The turtle got his fish



The dog going fighting with the turtle
The turtle going bite the dog
The boy going to take the dog and the turtle going bite the dog



The boy take the dog
He take the dog.
He put he tail in the water
He fall down
He going jump to take the dog to the water
The turtle dies
He going to take xxx out
The boy take the turtle in his hand and the frog and the dog going walking
The boy digging the hole

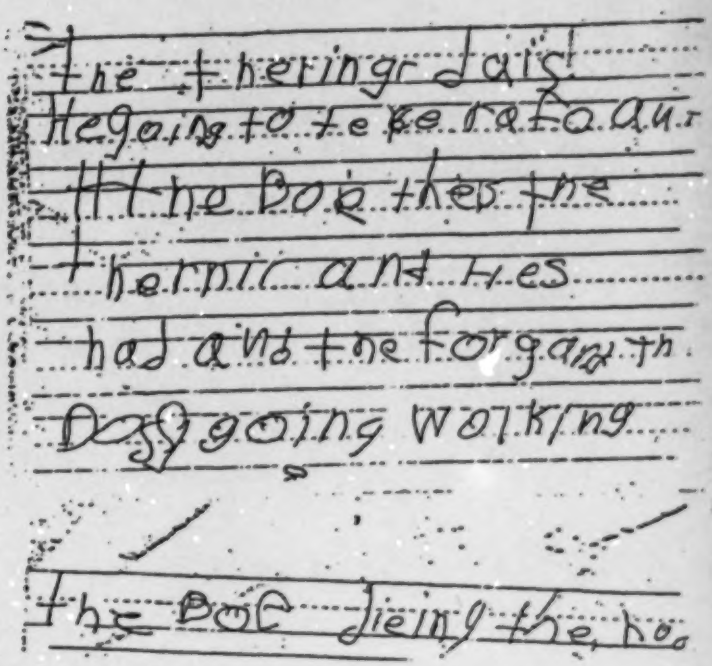

The therir dais
He going to te be ra fo aur
the Boe thes the
therrir ant hes
had ans the forgans th
Dog going Working
The Boe Dieing the ho

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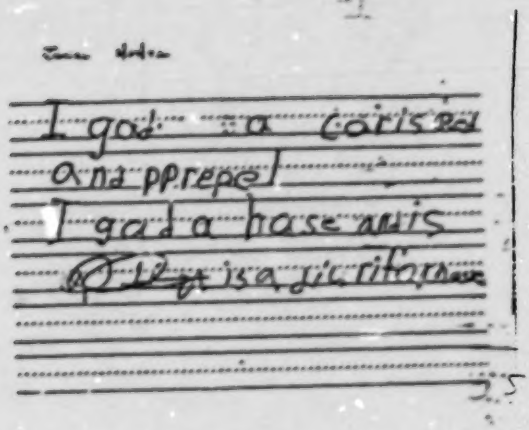
Figure 12



I got a car is red

and purple

I got a house and is

is a beautiful house

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